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## RECENT HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY.

1. History of the Norman Conquest.
2. The Life of Gladstone.
3. Lamartine and his Friends.

### I.

THE recent appearance of the index-volume of Dr. Edward A. Freeman's "History of the Norman Conquest" is fit occasion for some further reference to the work itself, already recognized as the greatest historical achievement of modern times. In looking again through these five volumes—comprising not only the results of more than a quarter of a century of the most patient, conscientious, and laborious research, but the results of the subjection of these materials to the crystallizing effect of a comparative, deductive, and combinative faculty of the highest order—we are impressed with two things above the general sustained high excellence of the work. First, Dr. Freeman's statesmanly conception of the importance to the world's history of the events of the year 1066. Selecting the Norman Conquest as the center around which he aggregates all other great world-struggles for comparison—a comparison shown to be as legitimate as it is exceedingly interesting; for instance, that of William the Conqueror with Theodoric the Goth, and also with the Crusader, Charles of Anjou; so that his history actually comprises a history of all other great commotions in the world previous to the Magna Charta—he shows with masterly skill the events of that year in their proper relations both to preceding and subsequent history, clearly demonstrating that upon them alone hinges the otherwise enigmatical situation of England in her language, literature, art, and political constitution, in her whole relation within herself and with other powers to-day. And in this Dr. Freeman does not represent that the England found by the Normans was swept out of history and replaced by them, but the rather preserved with only a strong Norman infusion. As, for example, in the lan-

guage—"It did not," says Dr. Freeman, "abolish the English language, but it brought in a new language by its side which for a while supplanted it as the language of polite intercourse, and which did not yield to the reviving elder speech till it had affected it by the largest infusion that the vocabulary of one European tongue ever received from another." As to the character and ultimate effects of the Norman Conquest, Dr. Freeman says: "Normandy taught England to become a Continental power, she taught her to become the special rival of France, and, having done this, she gave up, as it were, her own separate being, and herself sank into a French province. . . . Strange as it may seem, the Norman Conquest has in its results been the best preserver of the older life of England. . . . William can not, in view of universal history, claim to have left his impress on all time like Alexander, Cæsar, Constantine, and Charles. His work, after all, was bounded by a single island and a small portion of the mainland, but, within that comparatively narrow range, William wrought a work which, in one sense indeed, has been far more abiding than theirs. Of each of those lords of the world we may say that the influence of his work is eternal, but that his work has fallen to pieces; but, within William's island-world in the empire where he could be at once king and Cæsar, not only has the influence of his work been eternal, but his work itself abides. His work has been more lasting because in some sort less brilliant. Almost alone among conquerors, he conquered neither to destroy nor to found, but to continue."

The other exceptional excellence in this work is that it does not, with the exception of the pivotal battle of Senlac, dwell on the processes of battles, the bloody details, nor upon the minutiae of the peace negotiations, but deals with exceeding skill and interest with their larger effects in constitutional and ethnical history. The scene of the battle of Senlac was five times visited and carefully examined by Dr. Freeman, and the description of the battle, covering nearly forty pages, is minute, exact, and grandly picturesque; one turns from reading it with the feeling of having gazed upon a great painting of a battle—spear, plume, horse, rider, hill, slope, sky, even the very tumult and tremendous action caught into the colors by the divine touch of genius. It is a word-picture offering immortality to the artist who can reproduce it upon canvas, and suggests the inspired hand which painted "The Roll-Call." To this admirable structure the last and index volume is like a trained cicerone with whom we can make tour of the whole or any part with

quickness and certainty—a cicerone whose succinct and orderly exactness of information impresses us freshly with the philological interest as being almost if not quite equal to the historical interest of this majestic work.

## II.

TO-DAY, when it is clear that Mr. Gladstone—once more to the fore of English politics—will be *Cæsar aut nullus*, it is interesting to recall these strong just words of a leading English journal on the occasion of Mr. Gladstone's resignation of the Liberal leadership in March, 1878: "When the impartial voice of posterity shall pronounce its final and abiding judgment upon the career of Mr. Gladstone, it will be a verdict which will write his name in the very highest place upon the roll of fame. And, when the moving incidents of that most noble and most beneficent life of struggle and labor are summed up, there will hardly be a brighter page than that which records the history of his efforts during the past two years."

Nothing could be more timely than a work which should give us, just at this present crisis in English affairs, a faithful representation of Mr. Gladstone as gentleman, Christian, statesman, scholar, and author. There was published in England last fall, just when the immediate dissolution of Parliament was expected, a book in two volumes entitled "The Life of Gladstone,"\* by George Barnett Smith, which is now reproduced in America† in one thick volume. In spite of all that can be said and has been said by Mr. Smith's English and other critics concerning the difficulties in the way of writing a good biography of a man while he is still among us, there is, in the case of Mr. Gladstone, abundant material—without drawing on those private stores naturally reserved for posthumous tribute—which could be used with entire propriety for making a biographical account of him a vivid and characteristic work.

Mr. Smith, who is the author of a "Critical Biography of Shelley" and of a work entitled "Poets and Novelists," and has contributed critical and biographical articles to the "Edinburgh," "Fortnightly," "Macmillan," and "Cornhill," gives us in the present volume a greater bulk of facts, and very carefully chronological in their arrangement, about Mr. Gladstone and the years of English politics in which he has played so prominent a part, than does any other single work.

\* Published by Cassell, Petter & Galpin.

† Published by G. P. Putnam's Sons.

But the book provokes vexed laughter. We are promised biography and assured against polemics; yet, with the exception of four chapters out of the thirty, it is altogether polemical, and the whole it written in the spirit of what Americans would call a campaign document—at the very close of which we find this Parthian dart: “When the public expenditure has risen from £71,000,000, or thereabout, and a surplus in the late Premier’s time, to £85,000,000, and a deficit in that of his successors, the Liberals have a most potent argument with the electors.”

Mr. Smith tells us that, though Gladstone “is without that highest of all gifts, an absolutely informing genius (?), he has perhaps every endowment save that”; that “Liverpool gave him his financial talent and business aptitude, Eton his classical attainments, Oxford his moral fervor and religious spirit” (angels and ministers of grace defend us!); that “he has thrown a halo around the science of finance . . . has trodden every stage with success, and into every work he has undertaken has *imported* an earnestness,” etc.; that his “tenacity of purpose, strength of will, power to grapple with opposing circumstances, breadth of mind which grasped the various aspects of a difficult problem at a glance, all these practical qualities are reflected in him from his father.” *Ergo*, Mr. Gladstone started at zero, as a surface giving back the features of his sire, as a reservoir empty but most capacious, which Liverpool, Eton, and Oxford, made haste to fill, each after its kind. The father’s practical quality appears in his “early discovery” that he had a smart boy, and in his “wise determination” to send him to Eton, where, as we are next told, “the number of scholars is so great that proper supervision can not be given to them; hence, laxity as regards the older boys, while the smaller and weaker are exposed without hope of redress to the tyranny of their superiors in years and strength,” and where also “no instruction is given in any branch of mathematical, physical, metaphysical, or moral science, nor in the evidence of Christianity.” Then follows a discussion on the system of fagging, leading us—as this is a biography of Gladstone—to darkly surmise that he may have done a good deal of it. Then we are led back to Eton to hear that “many of the finest men of the century have been educated there,” yet that “perhaps they can not be legitimately claimed as the product of Eton”; and that “the curriculum is still strictly classical, though some *secondary* subjects such as French, German; and *mathematics* are taught.” Here are a style and a notion of things almost as wonderful as Sir Henry Rawlinson,

or Edward Dicey, or Sir Garnet Wolseley could afford ! With the exception of such heavy gambolings among facts and deductions, the work plods on with a trudging gait through a mass of material good, varied, and sufficient for a work worthy of the timely theme. The first chapter, upon Mr. Gladstone's ancestry, and the thirteenth, upon his "Homeric Studies," are very interesting and fairly well written, but the book in the main is a summary of England's foreign and domestic policy, the budgets and Parliamentary and country addresses from 1841 to 1879, and this tediousness is unrelieved by any skill in condensation or arrangement, or by any interesting deductions. Over a hundred pages, nearly one fifth of the whole work, are occupied with the elaborate financial report, whereas the twenty-sixth chapter of nine pages, reviewing Mr. Gladstone's financial policy, contains all that is essential to a fair understanding of his masterly financial improvements. The chapter on the Eastern Question is extremely superficial, and shows the author to be at this point, as elsewhere in the work, overwhelmed with theme and materials with which he is entirely unqualified to cope. The book is a tribute to Gladstone. So was the gold wreath of Turnerelli a tribute to Disraeli ! If we have spoken with severity, it is because the excellence of the last chapter has shown us that we might have been spared the keen dissatisfaction which any good judge of English affairs must feel with the book as a whole, whether considered as history, biography, or polemics. He who, undertaking a subject of such imminent interest and importance, could write the last chapter in this book so incomparably better than all the rest, was under the most imperative obligation to resist any and all pressure which could lead to the production of so hurried, indiscriminating, and so dull a compilation concerning a man described in Reid's celebrated "Cabinet Portraits" as "a mixture of Cromwell and Gambetta" !

### III.

IN "Lamartine and his Friends," published in France, in 1872, and just now excellently translated into English by Miss Odell, of Paris, no really new light is thrown upon Lamartine's well-known public career. But the author, Henri de Lacretelle, himself a novelist, a poet of fine quality, the disciple and life-long close friend of the great Frenchman, gives us what is of deep interest and value, a picture of Lamartine at home among his friends, his vineyards, his birds, and his hounds. The story—a *blasé* novel-reader would find it beguiling—has throughout the setting of exquisite natural sce-

nery, a background of life, insect, animal and human, making a kind of subdued orchestration, and in the midst is Lamartine, always in entire harmony with this bucolic beauty and retirement. Lacretelle was a little boy when he first saw Lamartine, who was sitting under a tree "in the garden at Bel-Air," talking with the elder Lacretelle. The shy boy peeped at his hero through the slats of the blinds in his mother's room, and saw Lamartine gently fondling his greyhound, and then heard himself kindly spoken of between the two elders. In his account of their long association in after-years, Lacretelle makes no retouchings of this first impression which take from Lamartine this lovable character of the great, simple, gifted child, most at home, as children always are, in the open air. Indeed, Lacretelle claims for him that he had no pride; that anything resembling arrogance or conceit was only apparent when in any sense he stood for others. When reproached by Lacretelle on one occasion, for his rudeness to "X—," "I do not belong to myself," said Lamartine. "If X— had dined with me, all Europe would have said that I accepted the ministry. But I really like X—; let us go and see him." Again, when, after the failure of the Republic, the Empire would have paid his debts, Lamartine, in spite of his terrible embarrassments, steadfastly refused, on the ground that in him the Republic should not lie down and lick the hand of the Empire. One thing that impresses us at every stage in Lacretelle's story is the great and most rare good fortune Lamartine had in a home circle of friends who made instant part in all his moods, so that he could express the very flush and freshness of his thought, the sudden dominance of emotion, or yield to the most inexplicable caprice, without missing the sympathy or the understanding of his friends. He had that harmony in surroundings and association which Madame de Staël speaks of so movingly in "*Corinne*" as being absolutely essential to a happy and true development of genius. His English wife, with her talents, intelligence, and refinement, made an admirable companion and a versatile helper for Lamartine. Her patience, energy, modesty, and devotion appear to have had a certain both inspiring and concentrative effect upon Lamartine's errant characteristics, which would hardly have been possible to a marriage relation less peaceful and firm.

There was a lovable greatness of mind about Lamartine which made him willingly considerate of all shades of opinion; and to the truths of other people, however opposed to that which was truth to him, and however severe in their bearing upon himself or his work,

he listened with amiable patience, and with a ductility to the criticisms of his literary work amounting almost to weakness, since it sometimes led him to alter what should have remained untouched. This trait alone must have been sufficient to give him an immeasurable personal effect, as the most sensitive *amour propre* needed no buckler against him, nor needed to provide him with one. It made it possible for all, who had the insight to be so, to be quite frank with him. On one occasion Ducuing met Madame Lamartine leaving her husband's study in tears. After listening to Lamartine's exclamations of flippant disparagement and ungracious praise of his wife, Ducuing said, "I do not know what the question was, but Madame Lamartine has cried, and I am sure you were in the wrong." "Come and dine with us this evening," was Lamartine's gentle and sole reply. Ducuing came, and found husband and wife in perfect harmony. At one of Lamartine's breakfasts Lacretelle *père* alluded with animated bitterness "to the Vandal who, in 1810, had sold the grand old stones (the Benedictine Abbey of Cluny) which even the Revolution had respected." An embarrassment fell upon the little group at table, showing itself in whispers among the young ladies, smiles between the servants, and the lower drooping of the head of a venerable *curé* over his plate.

Lamartine, whose habit was never to interrupt, broke into this eloquent philippic with unwonted dash, telling admirably the story of a visit he had once made in company with a Roman prince and his nieces to a monastery. The father-porter would not admit the nieces; "his house was holy—nothing unclean could enter there." So the uncleanness, in the shape of laughing, dark-eyed, high-born beauties, sat down on the outside steps till the gentlemen should come out. Within, Lamartine saw a young man writing upon the inspiring theme of priestly celibacy. The young monk rolled up his manuscript and became their escort, and at the outer portals came unexpectedly upon the pretty young countesses! They viciously poured out upon him the whole battery of blushes, smiles, gracious speeches, and coquettish glances, and, as he retired in violent discomfiture, "fragments of paper were falling behind him on the tiles—he was tearing to pieces his panegyric on celibacy!" After breakfast, Lacretelle *père* asked Lamartine why, even if it had been ill-timed, he had not allowed him to finish what he had begun.

"I beg a thousand pardons, my dear friend," said Lamartine, pointing to the old *curé*, telling his breviary, "but *there* is the destroyer of Cluny!"



With such delicate, ready, witful adroitness, we have the contrast of the tender but oddly asinine performance of Lamartine's taking his wife and friends upon a long ride to dine under the willows in front of the farmhouse of Château-Tiers, there to be waited on by the Janette of his "*Mémoires*," now no longer the little maid whom he used to meet and make love to in the meadows at Milly, but a handsome gray-haired woman of fifty years, a farmer's wife and the mother of six fine sons ; who nevertheless, as she recognizes her childhood's lover, has enough of sentiment left to blush and say oracularly, "It is a long time since the mignonette has faded."

It is hardly wonderful that Madame Lamartine should say, meaning perhaps very much : "Let us go and see the ruins. There is nothing more to be seen here." Thereafter, Lamartine, with an ostrich-like notion of secrecy, takes out of the cart a bag of money, which every one is aware he had brought, and gives it to Janette to buy the conscription of her son, charging her to keep the matter secret from all, especially from Madame Lamartine ! As we have seen, Lamartine told anecdotes and reminiscences admirably. Here is one of special interest, as Lacretelle repeats it : "We were walking in one of the little streets now obliterated, leading from the Hôtel-de-Ville to Palais Royale. 'Look down that passage,' said Lamartine ; 'I have witnessed an almost incredible scene there. I will tell it to you alone, but after I am dead you may publish it, for it is historical. I would never have spoken of it if Sainte-Beuve had not attached himself to the Empire, and if he did not insult the men of the Revolution every day. Remember this. It was in the first days of March, 1848, when I was drinking in great draughts of popularity, having just escaped the draught of hemlock. I was walking down the square. Everybody recognized me, saluted and followed me. Sainte-Beuve was passing, and, putting himself in front of the procession, took my arm. He was suspected of clericalism then, though, not long after, he went over to atheism. His monkish face displeased the crowd. I do not know whether he heard the murmurs or imagined them. He dragged me along. Night was falling. He pushed me into that passage to hide himself. The people outside were crying 'Vive Lamartine !' and 'Vive la République !' but there were no menaces. Then I had the most lamentable spectacle. Sainte-Beuve, crazy with fear, almost knelt to me, crying : 'Save me ! You have made them lay down their arms !' Yes, I have seen that grace of mind, that elegance of style,

that Athenian purist, kneeling on these slimy pavements ! Joseph Delorme has kissed my hands ! ”

Lamartine's spontaneous expressions were epigrams. In answer to a friendly expostulation about his extravagant outlay for advertisements, he exclaimed : “ What would you have me do ? God himself needs some one to ring the bells for him ! ” He wrote to his great friend, Dr. Pascal, who was ill, “ Come and die at Monceaux ! ” How could love say more or say less ? He characterized the seventeenth century as an “ interregnum of God. God spoke at that time only through two men, Rousseau and Voltaire. The devil reigned. Lucifer was Secretary of State.”

Of Louis Blanc, Lamartine said : “ I have never found a grain of ashes on the hearth of that sympathetic soul. None of my friends have aided me more than he in the abolition of capital punishment. Every word that he uttered was baptized in courage and conviction.”

In his talks with Lacretelle we find many of the paradoxical subtilties which account for appreciations of him very different from Lacretelle's. “ I admire him and consider him a force in the democracy,” said Lamartine of M. Ledru-Rollin, “ but my sympathies are not with the radicals. I do not want always to go to the root of the matter and hinder the flowering.”

When Lacretelle asked Lamartine how he came to leave literature for politics, when he could not know that he would succeed, and might therefore have lost in both, Lamartine silently led Lacretelle—they were walking—to where the peasants were chopping his beautiful trees from the side of the mountain. Knowing how deeply Lamartine must feel this sight, the peasants pretended to not notice him ; but, when he had passed, they drew their pipes from their mouths, and cried, “ Vive la République ! ” “ Now,” said Lamartine, with a smile—“ now you see why I have gone into politics.”

Of “ Les Girondins ” Lacretelle says : “ I might almost say I saw Lamartine write it. He was preparing for the work, by visiting the country and the houses he was to depict ; collecting about him the survivors of that great epoch, as well as the letters and contemporaneous newspapers. He went to the house of Madame Roland, near Ville-Franche ; to that of Charlotte Corday's aunt, in Normandy ; to the cellars of Marat, and to Robespierre's apartments in Rue Saint-Honoré, Paris. He conversed with Danton's widow ; and an old friend of Fouquier-Tinville—for he had a few—came to give some information in regard to the *procureur* of the guillotine.”

And it was of this work that M. Ledru-Rollin exclaimed, "The greatest service that Lamartine has rendered to the public is, that one can now discuss Robespierre without being taken for an anthropophagus!"

Debt was an element from which neither friendship nor money could extricate Lamartine. His notions of financial management kept him in a pitiable snarl of small and great torments. He bought off intruders with magnificent sums. He bought immense quantities of wine on credit, and sold it at a loss for the sake of the ready money, the mere sight of which turned the wine creditors into comfortably vague specters. Yet, when a national subscription was suggested—"I!" he exclaimed, "I hold out my hat for pennies? I would shoot myself first!"

The cession to him, for a period of thirty years, of a quarter of the province beyond Syria, by the Sultan, in token of Turkish gratitude for what he had said and written of Islamism, though it seemed a golden road out of all difficulty, sank, through Lamartine's genius for mismanagement, into a comparative *bagatelle*.

Madame de Lamartine's receptions at Saint-Point, Monceaux, and Paris meant, of course, the gathering of the greatest men and women of the time—especially the receptions in Paris. Thither came Montalembert, Edgar Quinet, and Michelet; loud-voiced Madame Sophie Gay and her beautiful, brilliant daughter, Madame Émile de Girardin; M. Circourt, of whom Lamartine said, "He is an Alexandrine library—I spend my life in studying his shelves and trying to decipher his papyrus"; Émile Deschamps, who shared with Balzac, Béranger, Lamennais, and Dumas, the honor of being shut out of the Academy. The fluctuations in the political moods of the actors in these scenes are as clearly and delicately rendered as the rest. The characterization of Léon Bruys d'Ouille is very careful, and throws a charming light upon him and upon Lamartine in their singular association. These receptions covered a period of fifteen years. As after the monarchy the republic, so after the nobles the people: patrician, political, artistic, and plebeian Europe thronged these historic rooms. But once the grand receptions over, and the great ones of the social and political world gone, Lamartine, at home again at Saint-Point or Monceaux, became the most simple and companionable of beings, rising early to write his poems, with his birds and dogs around him. His muse had robust nerves: the more noise and clatter, the faster and smother the verses grew. After breakfast, off with his friends

for a ramble, full of happy talk, of thoughts large, humorous, pithy, gracious ; after tea, keeping himself awake by "chasing the dogs through the rooms, searching for cigars in mysterious closets where there were valuable bank-notes, pages of poetry still more valuable, tobacco and Windsor soap, all heaped together in delightful confusion "; and at last, with the letters of Madame de Sévigné or Voltaire, going away to his chamber, "candle in hand and followed by his white hound," the rest soon going to bed also with dripping candles and laughing "Good-nights," "proud in the consciousness that something historical and beautiful was being prepared in the house"—this is the Lamartine which Lacretelle's loving and honorable tribute leaves with us—a memorable guest.

AXEL GUSTAFSON.